

Developing Critical Reading Skills

During our September 29, 2010 meeting of the Teaching Larger Classes (TLC) Community of Practice (CoP), I shared five questions designed to help students develop a critical eye when it comes to reading critically. Unfortunately I cannot take credit for these questions. I learned about them from Dr. Shelagh Crooks, an associate professor in the department of philosophy at Saint Mary's University.

The Questions (wording may not be exact, but you get the picture):

- What is overarching topic of the reading?
- What issue(s) is being discussed?
- What position does the author(s) take?
- What evidence does the author put forward?
- What is the quality of the evidence provided?

During the annual conference of the Society for Teaching and Learning (2009) Dr. Crooks shared how she uses the above questions during class as part of a learning activity. Drawing upon course readings she asked students to work through the questions in pairs/small groups before coming back together in one large group to share their discoveries. The exercise, she found, became easier over time as the students became more practiced and skilled in their interrogation of the readings. The activity not only engaged students with the readings, but contributed to richer class discussion.

Options:

1. Add one or two questions reflecting the inquiry process of your discipline (perhaps once students are more experienced with the original five questions)
2. Add a written component by asking students to submit, at the start of each class, a written summary (no more than 250 words) in response to the five questions. This not only provides feedback to you about student learning, but facilitates student comfort with writing in a low stakes manner. You could require all students to submit every class or divide the class up into alternate weeks. Marks could be assigned for participation or linked to another assignment or the seminar/tutorial if one is associated with your course

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